

B. AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Canceled)

2. (Canceled)

3. (Canceled)

4. (Canceled)

5. (Canceled)

6. (Canceled)

7. (Canceled)

8. (Canceled)

9. (Canceled)

10. (Canceled)

11. (Canceled)

12. (Canceled)

13. (Canceled)

14. (Canceled)

15. (Canceled)

16. (Currently amended) A system of flexibly secured adjacent mat panels comprising:

two or more adjacent mat panels, each panel having a plurality of holes near adjoining panel edges; and

a connector for-inserting into the holes of the adjacent mat panels to flexibly secure said adjacent mat panels to each other, said connector having at least ~~one~~ two two-prong connector unit for inserting into said holes, each said two-prong connector unit comprising:

an upper member having a first end and a second end, wherein said upper member lies on the top of said mat panels and spans the distance between the holes in said adjacent mat panels;

a first lower prong member having an inner end and an outer end, wherein said first lower member is sized to fit within the hole in one of said adjacent mat panels;

a second lower prong member having an inner end and an outer end, wherein said second lower member is sized to fit within the hole in another of said adjacent mat panels;

a first joining member connecting said first end of said upper member to said inner end of said first lower prong member, wherein said first joining member is sized to fit within the hole in one of said adjacent mat panels;

a second joining member connecting said second end of said upper member to said inner end of said second lower prong member, wherein said second joining member is sized to fit within the hole in another of said adjacent mat panels; wherein said upper member is substantially parallel to said first lower prong member and to said second lower prong member;

each of said lower prong members extending into the holes in the first and second mat panels.

wherein the at least one two-prong connector unit is joined in parallel to another said two-prong connector unit by at least one spanning member that connects said upper members of each of said two-prong connector units; and

wherein said upper members are parallel and said lower prong members are in the same plane as one another.

17. (Canceled)

18. (Original) The system of claim 16, wherein

said upper member is about five inches in length;

said first and second lower prong members are each about two inches in length;

the distance from the bottom surface of each of said lower prong members to the top surface of said upper member is about one and three quarters inches in length;

the length of said connector from the outer edge of said first end of said first lower prong member to the outer edge of said second end of said second lower prong member is approximately eight inches; and

said upper member, said first and second lower prong members, and said first and second joining members are comprised of one-half inch round rods.

19. (Previously presented) The system of claim 16, wherein

said upper member is about five inches in length;

said first and second lower prong members are each about two inches in length;

the distance from the bottom surface of each of said lower prong members to the top surface of said upper member is about one and three quarters inches in length;

the length of said connector from the outer edge of said first end of said first lower prong member to the outer edge of said second end of said second lower prong member is approximately eight inches;

the length of each of said at least one spanning member between the inner edges of said respective joining members is about four inches; and

said upper member, said first and second lower prong members, said at least one spanning member, and said first and second joining members are comprised of one-half inch round rods.

20. (Previously presented) The system of claim 16, wherein the internal angle between said upper member and said first joining member is at least ninety degrees and the internal angle between said upper member and said second joining member is at least ninety degrees.

21. (Canceled)

22. (Original) The system of claim 16, wherein said upper member, said first and second lower prong members, and said first and second joining members are comprised of a raw material selected from the group consisting of plywood, fiberglass, plastic, steel, metal sheets, one-half inch cold rolled steel, and metal panels.

23. (Previously presented) The system of claim 16, wherein said upper member, said first and second lower prong members, said first and second joining members, and said at least one spanning member are comprised of a raw material selected from the group consisting of plywood, fiberglass, plastic, steel, metal sheets, one-half inch cold rolled steel, and metal panels.

24. (Previously presented) The system of claim 16, wherein said upper member, said first and second lower prong members, and said first and second joining members of said two-prong connector unit are formed from a single piece of material, said formation process involving the step of:

cutting a formable raw material to a desired length to yield said single piece of material of a desired length; and

forming said single piece of material into said upper member, said first and second lower members, and said first and second joining members.

25. (Previously presented) The system of claim 16, wherein one or more of said upper member, said first and second lower prong members, and said first and second joining members of said

two-prong connector unit are formed by a process selected from the group consisting of bending, molding, sculpting, press forming, and casting.

26. (Previously presented) The system of claim 16, wherein each of said members is separately formed and joined together to form said connector.

27. (Canceled)

28. (Canceled)

29. (Canceled)

30. (Currently amended) A mat panel assembly comprising 1) a four-prong connector and 2) at least a first and second adjacent mat panels, said four-prong connector for flexibly connecting said at least first and second mat panels, with each mat panel having at least one hole near the edge abutting the adjacent mat panel, said mat panels together defining a total of at least four said holes, said four-prong connector comprising:

- a first upper member having a first end and a second end;

- a first lower prong member having an inner end and an outer end;

- a second lower prong member having an inner end and an outer end;

- a first joining member connecting said first upper member's first end to said first lower prong member's inner end, wherein said upper member is substantially parallel to said first lower prong member and substantially perpendicular to said first joining member;

- a second joining member connecting said first upper member's second end to said second lower prong member's inner end, wherein said first upper member is substantially parallel to said second lower prong member and substantially perpendicular to said second joining member;

- a second upper member having a first end and a second end;

a third lower prong member having an inner end and an outer end;

a fourth lower prong member having an inner end and an outer end;

a third joining member connecting said second upper member's first end to said third lower prong member's inner end, wherein said second upper member is substantially parallel to said third lower prong member and substantially perpendicular to said third joining member;

a fourth joining member connecting said second upper member's second end to said fourth lower prong member's inner end, wherein said second upper member is substantially parallel to said fourth lower prong member and substantially perpendicular to said fourth joining member;

at least one spanning member that connects said first upper member to said second upper member, wherein said first and second upper members are parallel to one another and said first, second, third, and fourth lower prong members are in the same plane as one another; and

each of said lower prong members extending into ~~their own~~ the holes in the first and second mat panels.